

## JA'FAR AL-SĀDIQ, SPIRITUAL FOREBEAR OF THE SŪFĪS

John B. Taylor\*

### HIS LIFE

SINCE most biographers lived in an age where divisions between *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī* and between followers of *sharī'ah* and followers after *ḥaqīqah* had hardened, these categories of approval or repudiation were often projected back to the earlier centuries of Islām. Orientalists too have made similar value-judgements and the *Shī'ī* and *Sūfī* have often provoked instinctive disapproval. This paper attempts to rescue the person of Ja'far al-Šādiq from such sectarian antipathies; it is not the present purpose to prove that Ja'far was a *Sūfī*, a *Shī'ī* or even a *Sunnī*; his personality is too complex for such labelling, and the age in which he lived was still free of such rigid antitheses. The life and thought of Ja'far deserve to be studied in their own right; one may then proceed to judge his social significance in the crucial years of the establishment of the 'Abbāsī regime, and of the parting of the ways for *Sunnīs* and *Shī'īs*; one may also point to the way in which his thought significantly anticipates much of the *Sūfī* spirituality which was to develop in both *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī* traditions in the next centuries. It is this latter purpose which is to be undertaken here. Having sketched the events of his life, and having touched upon some of its social implications, an attempt will be made to perceive the intellectual and spiritual achievements which make Ja'far so important a forebear of the *Sūfīs*.

The wide range of biographers of Ja'far is testimony to his influence. Apart from figuring in the histories of Ṭabarī and Mas'ūdī, in the dictionary of Ibn Khallikān and in all such general works, Ja'far is also important for three main groups of biographers: the heresiologists, the traditionists and the hagiographers. Each of these in his turn will betray a particular motive for his work, but material taken from a combination of them may give a reasonably balanced picture. Shahrastānī and Nawbakhtī show, from *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī* standpoints, how Ja'far belongs to the *Shī'ī* tradition; Dhahabī, for all his opposition to *tasawwuf* and the *Shī'ah*, can recognize Ja'far's contribution to *Sunnī* tradition; Abu Nu'aym and Farid al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār place Ja'far at the head of the line of saints and mystics. It is perhaps from early writers less concerned with such categories that the most faithful picture of Ja'far can come; some of the most suggestive clues to the personality and spirituality of Ja'far are to be found in Kulaynī or Kashshī. The versatility and magnetism of Ja'far in his own age was still more strongly felt by subsequent generations. His influence, or, if one prefers it, the re-occurrence

\* Dr. John B. Taylor, Reader in Islamic Studies at the Selly Oak College, Birmingham.

of his ideas, is particularly pervasive in the development of the Sūfī movement. The Sūfīs took up those intimate spiritual issues of revelation and the search for *haqīqah*, of personal morality, of individual communion with God, and of His continuing guidance, issues which will be seen to be the *raison d'être* for the early Shī'is self-assertion. It was when sectarian considerations engrossed the Shī'ah that the responsibility of such spiritual leadership passed to Sufis of both Sunnī and Shī'ī persuasion.

The birth of Ja'far, son of the fifth Imām, Muhammad Bāqir, and 'Umar Farwah, great-granddaughter of Abū Bakr, took place in Medina in 80 A.H., or perhaps 83 A.H. He thus inherited the position of Shī'ī leadership held by his father. The Shī'ahs were not a monolithic group ready to profit from the downfall of Umawī dynasty; the group which Ja'far headed was quietest in politics, although some of the ideas which he formulated were to become, after his death, divisive and even explosive. Shahrastānī, having introduced the subject of the *Imāmīyah* and having shown how sects multiplied from Ja'far's family's dissensions, makes clear his disapproval by exclaiming: "As for him who wanders from the Path and goes astray, God does not care in what river-bed he come to grief."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless he goes on to give a not unsympathetic picture of Ja'far:

"He was possessed of great wisdom in religion and letters, of perfect *hikmah* (science and philosophy), of mature ascetic discipline with respect to this world, and of complete abstinence from lusts. He stayed in Medina time enough to benefit the Shī'ah (sect) which traced their origin from him and to entrust his friends with the secrets of the *'ulūm* (occult sciences). Then he went to 'Irāq and stayed there for a time, but never interfered in the Imāmate and never argued with anyone about the Caliphate. He who is submerged in the sea of *ma'rifah* (inner knowledge) has no desire for the shore, and whoever climbs to the summit of *haqīqah* (Truth) has no fear of falling down. It is also said that he who is intimate with God is unsociable with men, and he who is sociable with other than God will be carried off by Satan."<sup>2</sup>

Ja'far's quietism is a frequent theme. In the above quotation Shahrastānī used the word *tawahhusha* for the concept "unsociable"; Nawbakhti too illustrates this almost farouche quality of the Imām with the following statement attributed to him:

"He who calls me by any name, God's curse be upon him. A man of the Shī'is came up to meet him, and Ja'far shunned him. It is told of him that a man of the Shī'is met him on the road and shunned him and omitted to greet him; and Ja'far thanked him for this and praised him and told him 'Such and such a man, however, met me and greeted me as nicely as possible' and he blamed him for this and did something unpleasant to him for it."<sup>3</sup>

(1) Shahrastānī: *Milal wa Nihal*, p. 124.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

(3) Nawbakhti: *Firāq*, p. 92.

Ja'far did not commit any of the excesses of the *Malāmāṭīyah* who were aggressively anti-social. He disowned and denounced the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, whom he had originally sent out as a *dā'ī*, but who developed a perverse antinomianism; one sect went so far as to say:

'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was a prophet sent out by Ja'far and ordered to obey him.' But the *Khaṭṭābiyah* made lawful the forbidden acts of fornication, theft and wine-bibbing; they gave up almsgiving, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage."<sup>4</sup>

Ja'far's rejection of these *ghulāt Shī'is* was probably more painful to him than his instinctive and consistent rebuttal of ingratiating partisans and of all direct political involvement. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb had been an intimate disciple of Ja'far, but had misused his esoteric teaching. Both Shahrastānī and Nawbakhti describe the belief of the *Khaṭṭābiyah* in a Divine incarnation in Ja'far and in his immortality.<sup>5</sup>

Nawbakhti also sees among their extremist "guilds" (*sunūf al-ghāliyah*) the roots of the *Qarāmīṭah* who believed in a transmission of the soul of Ja'far through Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and Muḥammad b. Isma'il b. Ja'far.<sup>6</sup> We shall see that Ja'far was indeed personally involved in formulating an "imamology," but this was rooted in doctrines of prophetic revelation rather than political opportunism.

Ja'far anticipates the whole Sufi tradition in his political quietism. He took no part in the revolt of Zayd in 122 A.H.; nor would he set himself up over against Zayd. Tabarī tells how deserters from Zayd came to Ja'far at Medina and were told that they should honour their oath and return to Zayd.<sup>7</sup> However, Ja'far's blatant ignoring of the government in Baghdād did not please the Caliph, al-Manṣūr. The biographers who make most of this aspect of Ja'far's life are, predictably, the hagiographers like Abū Nu'aym and Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. The attitude in which the latter introduces Ja'far was to be emulated by countless Sūfīs:

"One evening the caliph al-Manṣūr said to his minister 'Go and bring Ṣādiq that I may kill him.' The minister replied, 'He is sitting in a Corner in seclusion and is engaged in worship. He has withheld his hand from any temporal power.'.....'The Commander of the Faithful will not be vexed by him. What use is there in killing him.' However much he said it, he had no effect. The minister went to look for Ṣādiq, and al-Manṣūr said to his servants, 'When Ṣādiq comes in and I raise the royal cap from my head, kill him.' The minister brought in Ṣādiq, but al-Manṣūr immediately jumped up and made way for Ṣādiq, and seated him on the throne, and made obeisance before him. His servants were astonished. Then al-Manṣūr said, 'What need do you have?' Ṣādiq said, 'That you should not summon me before yourself and should leave me to my worship of God.'"<sup>8</sup>

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 37.

(5) Shahrastānī: *op. cit.*, pp. 136-8; Nawbakhti: *op. cit.*, p. 57.

(6) Nawbakhti: *op. cit.*, p. 61.

(7) Tabarī: *Annales*, Vol. II, p. 1700.

(8) 'Aṭṭār: *Tadhkirah*, p. 11.

Abū Nu'aym relates another tradition concerning Ja'far and al-Manṣūr:

"Some flies settled on al-Manṣūr, and he drove them away from him; they returned, and he drove them away until he became angry with them. And Ja'far b. Muhammad came into his presence, and al-Manṣūr said to him, 'Abū 'Abdullāh why did God create flies?' He replied, 'In order that the tyrants might be humbled by them'."

Two further quotations from Abū Nu'aym may illustrate the motive behind Ja'far's passivity; he did not preach passive resistance as a political protest but as a spiritual affirmation. This is seen in a meeting of Ja'far with Sufyān al-Thawrī:

"Sufyān al-Thawrī said, 'I shall not rise until you relate me a tradition,' Ja'far said to him, 'I shall do so, but what use to you are a number of traditions, Sufyān. When God blesses you with His blessing, I would that it were enduring and permanent! Multiply praises and thanks for this! God has said in His Book (14:7): 'If you are thankful, I shall assuredly give you increase. And if you find His providence slow, multiply your requests for pardon. For God has said in His Book (71:10): 'Ask pardon of your Lord; verily He is One Who pardons. He will send upon you the rains of heaven in torrents, and will aid you with wealth and sons, and will appoint gardens for you and rivers too.' O Sufyān, when the misfortune of an order from the sultān or someone else befalls you, multiply your affirmations that 'There is neither might nor strength but in God.' This is the key to the door of happiness, and one of the treasures of Paradise.' And he clasped Sufyān by the hand."

Ja'far's personal refusal of power is underlined in the tradition of his saying:

"God Almighty revealed to the world: 'Serve him who serves me, and weary of him who serves you.'"

Any organization of a following by Ja'far is to be seen chiefly in the intellectual and spiritual leadership which he exercised. The academic and spiritual disciples of Ja'far were not only concerned with the disciplines of *ḥadīth* collection and criticism and of *fiqh* elaboration. Ibn Khallikān wrote:

"He composed a discourse (or treatise) on alchemy, augury and omens and the Sūfī Abū Mūsā Jābir ibn Haiyān of Tarsus compiled a work of two thousand pages in which he inserted the problems of his master Ja'far al-Sādiq, which formed five hundred treatises."

This is not the place to pursue the many questions which surround the work of Jābir, much of which Ruska and Kraus have plausibly attributed to later Ismā'īlī writers.<sup>13</sup> But it may be suggested that one should not too

(9) Abū Nu'aym: *Hilyah*, Vol. III, p. 198.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 193.

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 194.

(12) Ibn Khallikān: *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 300.

(13) Mieli: *Science Arabe*, p. 61.

quickly dismiss this study of alchemy as nonsensical magic; its chief aim is a viable doctrine of gnosis, and even its syncretist echoes of Sabacan rite should not rule it out of consideration as a genuine spiritual searching.

The associates of Ja'far were not all suspicious forerunners of the *Qarāmitah* like Jābir ibn Haiyān or Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. Ja'far is also frequently described in the company of such eminently respectable men as Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik ibn Anas and Wāṣil ibn 'Atā, all of whom heard traditions from him. We shall return to Ja'far's role as a traditionist, but meanwhile we may complete our sketch of Ja'far's life by reference to the nature of Ja'far's relationship with these distinguished Sunnīs. Abū Nu'aym records a pithy statement of Ja'far which combines suspicion of both political and "ecclesiastical" institutions:

"The fuqahā are the confidants of the prophets but when you see them riding towards the sultāns suspect them."

This is found more fully stated in Kulaynī:

"Ja'far said that the Prophet said: 'The fuqahā are the confidants of the prophets in so far as they do not enter into the *dunyā*'. Ja'far was asked what their entrance into the *dunyā* meant. He said: 'Following the sultān; when they do that beware of them, for the sake of your *dīn*'."

Stories of Ja'far's victory in argument with Abū Ḥanīfah have appealed to people. Ibn Khallikān quotes an anecdote of Ja'far's tripping him for weak knowledge of a gazelle's teeth-construction:<sup>16</sup>

Before turning to the aspects of Ja'far's intellectual, ascetic and spiritual life, one may note one final external observation of Ja'far's life which was to exercise such an attraction and command, such an allegiance among his posterity. Without searching for strikingly miraculous *Karāmāt* in Majlisī, one may cite as an example of the charisma of *walāyah* attached to Ja'far's family a tradition recorded in Nawbakhtī:

"Muhammad b. Ja'far entered into his father's presence one day. He was a little boy and, as he ran to him, he stumbled on his shirt. His face became flushed, and Ja'far rose for him, kissed him, brushed the dust from his face, and put him on his lap, saying, 'I heard my father say, "When you have a child which resembles me—call him after me, and he will be like me and like the Prophet of God (peace be upon him, and his family, and his *sunnah*)'."

The response of popular piety which such a story suggests reminds one of the contexts in which spirituality, however abstruse, must eventually communicate its discoveries.

Ja'far al-Sādiq died in 148 A.H., poisoned, according to Shī'ī traditions, by grapes sent by the caliph.

(14) Abū Nu'aym: *op. cit.*, p. 194.

(15) Kulaynī: *Uṣūl*, p. 26.

(16) Ibn Khallikān: *op. cit.*, p. 301.

(17) Nawbakhtī: *op. cit.*, p. 65.

## HIS THOUGHT

(i) *Haqīqah and Revelation*

In considering Ja'far al-Sādiq as a spiritual forebear of the Sūfis, we shall organize our observations under four headings: "*Haqīqah* and Revelation," "Personal Morality," "Individual Communion with God," and "Continuing Guidance." These issues seem to summarise some of the primary concerns, epistemological, ascetic, private and communal, felt by an early Shī'ī like Ja'far and also by the Sūfis who followed in later generations. In their search for the Truth, early Shī'īs and Sūfis threw over the authority of the community and initiated a search which must be personal to be genuine. They rejected the legal, social *sharī'ah* for the inner knowledge of the *haqīqah*, comprised in the revealed text. Yet despite the different concepts of what is authoritative, despite the difference in tools between the almost mechanical rules of *isnād* or *usūl al-fiqh* and the esoteric art of *ta'wīl*, nevertheless one should not forget that there is a revealed authority common to both, the *sūtrahs* of the Qur'ān.

That the Qur'ān is central in all Muslim experience may seem platitudinous, until one remembers the accusations of unfaithfulness which have attached to all those who have gone further than the communally approved *tafsīr* in exploring the meaning of the Qur'ānic revelation. The very fact that the most bitter hostility directed to Sūfis and Shī'īs alike has been occasioned by their exegetical esotericism shows the centrality of the search for *haqīqah* in Divine scripture, and the passionate convictions which surround it. Whereas it was the community which inherited, built and canonized its *sharī'ah*, grounded in the principles of *tafsīr*, it was the individual Shī'ī and Sufī who sought after *haqīqah* in the inner meanings disclosed by *ta'wīl* or *tahqīq*. It is of great significance that Ja'far should be regarded as the author of a *tafsīr* and of *hadīth* which not only permeated into qualified Sunni acceptance but which also anticipated much of the mystical interpretation of the Sūfis and the esoteric dogma of later Shī'īs.

Hujwīrī speaks of Ja'far as having "written famous 'books' explaining *taṣawwuf*."<sup>18</sup> Brockelmann (S.I., 194) is sceptical of the authenticity of works attributed to Ja'far. An edition of his *tafsīr* was influential from an early date in the edition of Dhū al-Nūn Miṣrī (born c. 180 A.H.). This widely travelled mystic is reputed to have written not only such spiritual meditations as Muḥāsibī quotes, but also works of alchemy, such as the lost treatises *Rukn Akbar* and *Thiqah*; he clearly belongs in the line of intellectual and spiritual enquiry which stems from Ja'far. It is not certain that Ja'far composed the treatise edited by Dhū al-Nūn. Massignon makes two interesting suggestions.<sup>19</sup> Jābir ibn Hayyān al-Sūfī dedicated books, including those on asceticism, to Ja'far; and Dhū al-Nūn was a disciple of Jābir. Ibn Abī al-'Awjā is said to have fabricated and edited a mystical *hadīth* which was condemned for *tashbih* and *ta'tīl*; its avoidance of such terminology as *ishq* and *tafwīd* suggests one who, like Ibn Abī al-'Awjā, had left the school of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī for that of Ja'far.

(18) Hujwīrī: *Kashf*, p. 78.

(19) Massignon: *Essai*, p. 182.

Whoever was responsible for the original compilation, it seems almost certain that these traditions and their exegesis did come from Ja'far. Makki, the traditionist and ascetic of the third century of the *hijrah*, makes several references to a written source which he describes as follows: *rawaynā musnadā min tariq ahl al-bayt*.<sup>20</sup> Massignon elsewhere describes these as "moral *hadīth* with a Sūfī tendency, circulating in the mystic circles of Baghdād and Kufah and attributed to Ja'far." A passage in the *Haqā'iq al-tafsīr* of Sulamī describes them as "detached verses, classed without order,"<sup>21</sup> however it was that they were compiled, the ideas, and more important, the terminology of Ja'far, made a significant contribution to Sūfī thought. We shall return later to specific examples of this, collected by Massignon in the work of al-Hallāj. Meanwhile we shall notice the principles which must have guided Ja'far in his *tafsīr*.

It may be misleading to dwell upon the cabalistic intricacies of the esoteric *Djafr* alphabet attributed to him;<sup>22</sup> one must first appreciate the spiritual convictions which governed his attitude to the Qur'ān. Corbin quotes an incident where Ja'far's disciples respected his long ecstatic silence after the prayer rite. Ja'far explained this as follows:

"I did not cease to repeat this verse until I could hear it from that same Angel who pronounced it for the Prophet."<sup>23</sup>

Abū Nu'aym records Ja'far's exegesis of *Sūrah* 15:75, which reads: "Surely in that there are signs for those who mark (*mutawassimin*). Ja'far gives the meaning as *mutafarrisin*, "those who look steadfastly at the outward to perceive the inward."<sup>24</sup>

The importance of esoteric contemplation and apprehension is great for both Sūfis and Shī'īs; nor should it be incomprehensible to a Sunni who perceives the dimension of mystery in God's dealings with men and man's response to God. Corbin points out that when Ja'far makes repeated references to *sirr* he is referring at once to that which is hidden and also to that which may be discovered through the "pensee secrete," "transcendence" or "supraconscience." He explains this with a quotation from Ja'far:

"Our cause is a secret veiled in secrecy (*sirr mastūr fī sirr*), the secret of something which remains veiled, a secret, which only another secret can expound; it is a secret on top of a secret, which is sufficient as a secret."<sup>25</sup>

Again, Ja'far is quoted:

"Our cause is the Truth, and the Truth of the Truth (*haqq al-haqq*); it is the exoteric, and it is the esoteric of the exoteric (*bāḥin al-zahir*), and it is the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāḥin al-bāḥin*). It is the secret, and the secret of something which remains veiled, a secret which is sufficient as a secret."<sup>26</sup>

(20) Massignon: *Passion*, pp. 732-3.

(21) Massignon: *Essai*, p. 179, p. 181.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 80.

(23) Corbin: *Histoire*, p. 22.

(24) Abū Nu'aym: *op. cit.*, p. 194.

(25) Corbin: *Combat Spirituel*, p. 101.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Corbin goes on to show how this allowed *taqīyah* to develop to the point where Ja'far could say:

"He who is without *taqīyah* (he who does not observe discretion, through unawareness or refusal of the esoteric), such a man is without religion."<sup>27</sup>

It was to be expected that a search for *ḥaqīqah* such as Ja'far's would earn disapproval and suffer misunderstanding and distortion. Such works as his *Misbāh al-sharī'ah wa-miftāḥ al-ḥaqīqah* have earned suspicious comment from orientalist like Strothmann who speaks of its "not-unobjectionable orthodoxy" and its "mystical tone."<sup>28</sup> Corbin sees the profound influence that such a work played throughout the history of Shi'i spirituality, and sees that the chief issue is not the authorship of this anthology, but the undoubted succession of gnostic thought from Ja'far right through to Mullā Ṣadrā.<sup>29</sup> Ja'far's work had its undeniable impact upon the Sunnī community too. The assessment of Ja'far as its *muḥaddith* which one reads in al-Dhahabī is perhaps typical. In his *Tadhkirat al-Huffaz* he quotes Abū Ḥanīfah's saying, "I never saw a man more learned than Ja'far ibn Muḥammad." He gives the testimony of Abū Ḥatīm: "Trustworthiness such as his is unquestionable," and he records a saying of Ja'far himself: "Bear with my loss before you miss me; assuredly no one will relate traditions to you after me as I do."<sup>30</sup> Dhahabī's account of Ja'far's role as a *muḥaddith* is more critically and more epigrammatically expressed in his *Mizān al-i'tidāl*:

"Bukhari did not base arguments upon him. Yahyā ibn Sa'id (Qaṭṭān) said: 'Lashes are dearer to me than he; there is something about him which eats into my soul.' Muṣ'ab said on the authority of al-Darāwardī, 'Mālik did not relate traditions on the authority of Ja'far until the fortunes of the Banū 'Abbās were victorious; according to Muṣ'ab ibn 'Abbās, Mālik was not wont to relate anything on the authority of Ja'far until it was gathered together into one corpus.'<sup>31</sup>

Two further anecdotes of Dhahabī may conclude our observations on the intellectual and academic influence of Ja'far:

"Ahmad ibn Sa'id ibn Abū Maryam said: 'I heard Yahyā saying: 'I used not to ask Yahyā ibn Sa'id about Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, and he said to me, 'Why have you not asked me about the *ḥadīth* of Ja'far?' I said, 'I do not cite him as an authority.' And he said to me that Ja'far was a *ḥāfiẓ* and that his father's *ḥadīth* was rightly-guided (*masdūd*).'" And Ibn Mu'in said 'Ja'far is reliable'; then he said: 'Iḥāf ibn Ghīāth went away to 'Abadān, a place which is a staging point on the road (from Baṣrah); and he gathered to himself the people from Baṣrah, who said: 'Do not give us traditions on the

authority of three men, Ash'ath ibn 'Abd al-Malik, 'Umar ibn 'Ubayd and Ja'far ibn Muḥammad.' And he said: "As for Ash'ath, he belongs to you, and I leave him to you; and as for 'Umar, you are better informed; and as for Ja'far, if only you were in Kūfah and the blacksmith's mallet were beating your shoes.'

Ja'far was clearly a controversial figure. We shall return to some of the epistemological issues which underlie his philosophy, or rather theosophy, of revelation and Truth. His chief authority was, as for all Muslims, the Qur'ān and the morality and spirituality which he advanced was subservient to this. Our preliminary study of Ja'far as *muḥassir* and *muḥaddith* gives us the context in which to study that morality and spirituality, and thence the subsequent doctrines of the Prophet and imām.

### (ii) Personal Morality

The moral issue which dominated the generation of Ja'far was that of Divine predestination. This doctrine often reflects an authoritarian tradition in political or theological circles. It is not surprising, then, that Ja'far shunned such a doctrine of *jabr*; nor did he go to the other extreme, attributed to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, whereby God "invested" man (*tafwīd*) with his own actions. Ḥasan 'Askarī described the view of Ja'far as:

"Neither *jabr* (impiety!), nor *tafwīd* (idolatry!); but something between the two."<sup>32</sup>

Massignon's somewhat cryptic comments on the *tafsir* attributed to Ja'far mention that in the context of 'adl, Divine justice, a distinction is made by Ja'far between 'amr and *mashī'ah*; furthermore *mashī'ah* is chosen in place of 'iradah.<sup>33</sup> For the *Mu'tazilah*, God's 'amr and His 'iradah were the same thing; but Ja'far's category of God's "good pleasure" is more intimate than His "command" or "will." Shahrastānī was apparently unaware of this lexical sensitivity, although he represents Ja'far's probable view clearly:

"This is his opinion on 'iradah, that God Almighty had willed one thing for us and has willed another thing through us. As for that which He has willed for us, He has concealed this from us, but as for that which He has willed through us, He has made it plain (*azharahu*) for us. So we are not so much concerned with what He has willed for us compared with what He has willed through us."<sup>34</sup>

The chief solution to these moral dilemmas was not theoretical for Ja'far. Such problems were answered by a personal, practical morality. Charitable expenditure or donation is a starting point for all Muslim social ethic, and so the tradition that "Ja'far al-Ṣādiq used to give food until nothing remained for his family" is naturally popular; Dhahabī repeats it from Abū Nu'aym, and adds "the virtues of this sayyid are told in great number."<sup>35</sup>

(27) *Ibid.*, p. 102.

(28) Strothmann in *Der Islam*, XXI, p. 302.

(29) Corbin: *Livre des Penetrations*, p. 26.

(30) Dhahabī: *Tadhkirah*, p. 166.

(31) Dhahabī: *Mizān*, p. 192.

(32) Massignon: *Passion* pp. 612-3; cf. Shahrastānī: *op. cit.*, p. 125.

(33) Massignon: *Essai* pp. 181-2.

(34) Shahrastānī: *op.* : p. 125.

(35) Abū Nu'aym: *op.* : p. 194; Dhahabī: *Tadhkirah*, pp. 166-7.



Abū Nu'aym records a very wholesome prescription for the good life, given by Ja'far to Mūsā:

"If you remember what I say, you will live happy and die honoured. . .Whoever stretches his eye towards what is in another's hand dies poor. He who is not pleased with God's lot for him is suspecting God in His ordering of life. He who draws the sword of desire is killed by it. He who digs a ditch for his brother in kindness is watered by it."<sup>36</sup>

Asceticism vies with generosity as a virtue which even today wins instinctive admiration from Muslims. Abū Nu'aym and Farid al-Din 'Aṭṭār predictably endow Ja'far with the quality of *zuhd*. Dhahabī too quotes Abu Nu'aym's tradition of Ja'far's wearing the ascetic's *sūf*, and of the Sūfi Sufyān al-Thawrī's discovery of this:

"I entered into the presence of Ja'far ibn Muḥammad and he was wearing a full-sleeved gown of silk and a robe of smoke-coloured silk. And I began to stare at him in amazement. 'O al-Thawrī,' he said, 'What is the matter with you that you stare at me? Perhaps you are amazed at what you see.' And I said, 'Son of the Prophet, this is not your garment, nor the garment that your fathers wore'.....Then he rolled back the sleeve of his gown and he disclosed beneath it a white gown of wool (*sūf*) bleached from end to end and sleeve to sleeve. And he said, 'O al-Thawrī, our dress here belongs to God, and the other belongs to you. We have hidden that which belongs to God, and we have shown that which belongs to you.'<sup>37</sup>

This story is further elaborated by 'Aṭṭār:

"Sādiq was seen wearing a precious robe of silk. They said, 'Son of the Prophet of God, this is not in accord with the life of your holy family.' He took that man by the hand and drew it into his sleeve which was clad in coarse lint so that his hand was pricked. Sādiq said 'This is for God and this is for men (*hādḥā li al haqq wa hādḥā li al-khalq*).'<sup>38</sup>

However attractive these anecdotes are, they are to be suspected as artificial attempts to clothe Ja'far in the charismatic *sūf*. If these sayings attributed to Ja'far have any historical value, it may be as echoes of his insistence upon *bāṭinī*, as opposed to *zāhirī*, values. Suspicion hardens when one reads in the early source of Kashshī a remarkably similar story under the biography of Sufyān al-Thawrī:

"Sufyān al-Thawrī entered into the presence of Abū 'Abdullāh who was wearing splendid clothes. 'O Abū 'Abdullāh,' he said, 'Your father used not to wear the like of these clothes!' He replied, 'My father lived in a time of barrenness and shortage; but the present time is one when this world has loosed its water-skins and its people have a right to their striped garments.'<sup>39</sup>

(36) Abū Nu'aym: *op. cit.*, p. 195.

(37) *Ibid.*, p. 194; Dhahabī: *op. cit.*, p. 167.

(38) 'Aṭṭār: *op. cit.*, p. 12.

(39) Kashshī: *Rijāl*, p. 336.

This example of the romanticizing by later hagiographers encourages a scepticism for some of the traditions concerning Ja'far which Ritter quotes from 'Aṭṭār's discussion of *zuhd* in his *Ilāhinamah*; the world is represented as a wilderness to which the human heart should not cling:

"Ja'far al-Šādiq said, 'The world is a wilderness; but still more so is the heart which attaches itself to what is wilderness. However the other world is a well-built land; but still better-built is the heart which covets nothing else but that.'<sup>40</sup>

Ja'far's teaching should not so much point to an other-worldly escapism as to a commitment to both this world and the next; the other pose of the paradox is seen in a statement attributed to Ja'far elsewhere in 'Aṭṭār's works:

"It is in this world that God Almighty has His Paradise and His Hell. Heaven is well-being and Hell is disaster. It is well-being when you do your own work with God; and it is Hell when you do God's work with your own resources."<sup>41</sup>

Hujwiri quotes Ja'far as saying that there can be no *'ibādah* without *tawbah*. The perpetual spiritual exercise of *tawbah* is illustrated by Ja'far's plea and by Hujwiri's comment upon it:

"Ja'far replied: 'My actions are such that I shall be ashamed to look my grandsire in the face on the Last Day.' To see one's faults is a quality of perfection and is characteristic of those who are established in the Divine presence, whether they be prophets, saints or apostles."<sup>42</sup>

*Tawbah* is the hallmark of preaching which insists that rite is insufficient; the celebrated Mu'tazilī al-Jubbā'i advanced the view that *tawbah* must be part of the sincere *'amāl* which authenticate *imān*. Ja'far—and al-Ḥallāj—went further in seeing it is something which must actually precede ceremonial rite and intellectual enquiry. 'Aṭṭār expresses as follows Ja'far's doctrine of *tawbah qabl 'ibādah* which al-Ḥallāj was to develop:

"*'Ibādah* cannot become true without *tawbah*, for God Almighty made *tawbah* preferable to *'ibādah* since God Almighty said (9. 113) 'Al-tāibūna al-'abidūna.'<sup>43</sup>

Preliminary searches in Makki,<sup>44</sup> when he commences his descriptions of the *maqāmāt* of mystical progression by discussing *tawbah*, have not shown any reference to Ja'far's doctrine of *tawbah*. This may be because Makki regards *tawbah* as a canonical necessity, *wajīb*, whereas Ja'far's approach is less systematic.

We shall see that the road which takes its departure from *tawbah* ends in *maḥabbah*; the *tafsir* of Ja'far (apud Baqli) states:

(40) Ritter: *Das Meer*, p. 51; cf. p. 216.

(41) 'Aṭṭār: *op. cit.*, p. 15.

(42) Hujwiri: *op. cit.*, p. 80.

(43) 'Aṭṭār *op. cit.*, p. 14.

(44) Makki: *Qūt*, Vol. II, pp. 65 ff.

"God made famous His love for the believers before His Creation; He showed that love is the most intimate form of observance which our rite can offer Him."<sup>45</sup>

The metaphor of a road from moral conversion to the spiritual, reciprocal relationship of love between God and the faithful (Massignon compares *Sūrah*s 5.59 and 2.160) is not fully adequate. Personal morality for Ja'far is not a steady progression from *tawbah* through *zuhd* to *maḥabbah*. It is a spiritual communion, apprehended but uncomprehended, rooted in the historical revelation of the Qur'ān but guided by the continual inspiration of God. To this avowedly esoteric, cyclical experience we now turn. It is built on the humble but confident personal morality which we have just sketched and which 'Aṭṭār tellingly summarizes:

"Šādiq was told, 'You have all the virtues—asceticism (*zuhd*) and inner nobility (*kurm-i bātin*)! You are the lustre of your family! But you are very proud!' Ja'far said, 'I am not proud; but it is pride in God's Almightyness (*kibr-kibriyā'i ast*), because when I desist from personal pride, His Almightyness enters in and settles in place of my own pride. There can be no Almightyness in personal pride, but there should be pride in God's Almightyness."<sup>46</sup>

(iii) *Individual Communion with God*

The almost tangible reality of man's spirit (*rūh*) for Ja'far is shown in answers attributed to him which Kulaynī records in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, *Bāb al-Rūh*, of his *Usūl al-Kāfi*:

"I asked Abū 'Abdullāh concerning the spirit in man and God's saying (15.29; 38.72), 'When I have formed him and I have breathed into him of My rūh.' Ja'far said, 'This spirit is something created (*mahklū-qah*), and the spirit that was in Jesus was something created.' ..... "I asked Abū 'Abdullāh about God's word, 'And a spirit from Him (4.169).' He said 'This is the spirit of God, a created thing which God has created in man and Jesus' ..... "I asked Abū 'Abdullāh about the word of God, Mighty and Glorious, 'And I have breathed into him of My rūh.' I asked him how this breathing took place and he said 'The spirit is set in motion like the wind, and it is only called the rūh because its name is derived from the rūh, for the soul resembles the wind. ...'"

Ja'far was probably something of a metaphysicist as well as a theosophist. It is in the latter role that Sūfis and Shī'is were to elaborate his personality, as we shall see when we come to study the development of his doctrine of *wahy* and *ilhām*. Meanwhile another line of 'Aṭṭār seems relevant:

"Whoever strives with his soul for soul will achieve blessing, and whoever strives with his soul for his Lord will achieve his Lord."<sup>48</sup>

(45) Massignon: *Passion*, p. 609.

(46) 'Aṭṭār: *op. cit.*, p. 13.

(47) Kulaynī: *op. cit.*, p. 76.

(48) 'Aṭṭār: *op. cit.*, p. 14.

It has already been realized in studying Ja'far's intellectual and moral priorities that his spirituality has practical foundations and manifestations. *Tasawwuf* must not be understood as all ecstasy and escapism. Spiritual communion with God, *al-Haqq*, is assuredly an inward, and an individual experience, but for Ja'far as for the whole line of Sūfis, there was a compulsion to articulate and express this experience for others to recognize it and emulate it. Even the most solitary ascetic can have this sense of responsibility for communication of his spiritual discoveries. Ja'far, in his esoteric *tafsir*, as in his *hadiths*, which played so large a part in the formulation of Shī'ī, and especially Ismā'īlī *fiqh*, introduced a terminology which attempted to explore and expose these spiritual realities, chief among which was the conviction that a man's soul may aspire to see God.

*Ma'rifah qalbiyāh* is possibly the most important concept both for the mysticism of the Sūfis and for the imāmi doctrines of the Shī'is. Corbin draws attention to the passage in Kulaynī where one sees Ja'far's views on the vision of God growing out of the views of his father, the fifth imām, Muḥammad Bāqir:

"A man of the *Khawārij* came into the presence of Abū Ja'far and said to him, 'Abū Ja'far, what thing do you worship?' 'God,' he replied. 'Do you see Him?' he said. 'No,' he replied, 'The eyes do not see Him with the vision of sight, but the hearts (*al-qulūb*) see Him by the realities of faith (*bi-ḥaqq'ia al-īmān*). He is not known by analogy (*qiyās*) and he is not grasped by the senses (*bi-al-hawāss*) and cannot be likened to men. He is described by signs (*Mawsūf bi al-āyāt*) and known by symbols (*Mā'rūf bi-al-'alāmāt*). He does not use force in His judgements. It is He Who is God, than Whom there is no other god."<sup>49</sup>

Kulaynī goes on to Ja'far's recording the answer of the first Imām:

"A learned man (*ḥābr* of the Jews?) came to the Commander of the Faithful and said, 'Commander of the Faithful, have you seen your Lord when you worship Him?' 'Woe on you!' he replied, 'I would not have worshipped a lord whom I did not see.' 'How did you see Him?' he said. He replied 'Woe on you! The eyes do not grasp Him with the vision of sight, but the hearts have seen Him by the realities of faith.'<sup>50</sup>

The theme of these two quotations is vividly taken up in the biographies of Ja'far by Abū Nu'aym and Farid al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. Abū Nu'aym shows Ja'far's attacking the *ra'y* and *qiyās* of the intellect on the occasion of Ibn Abī Laylā's and Abū Hanifah's visiting him:

"He said to Ibn Abī Laylā, 'Who is this with you?' He replied, 'This is a man with insight and penetration in the matter of religion.' He said, 'Perhaps he constructs analogies (*yaqisu* 'measures' in the matter of religion with his *ra'y*'. 'Yes,' he replied; and Ja'far said to

(49) Kulaynī: *op. cit.*, p. 54; cf Corbin: *Philosophie Prophetique*, p. 59.

(50) Kulaynī: *op. cit.*, p. 54.

Abū Hanifah... 'Have you measured your head yet?' (Ja'far proceeds to confound Abū Hanifah with various riddling questions)... Ja'far said, 'My father told me on the authority of my grandfather that the Prophet of God, upon whom be peace, said "The first who measured the matter of religion with his *ra'y* was Iblis... And him who measures religion with his *ra'y*, God Almighty binds together with Iblis on the day of Resurrection because he followed him in *qiyās*.'<sup>51</sup>

The problem of the true knowledge and vision of God in Ja'far's teaching is explained in the lively anecdote of 'Aṭṭār:

'A man came before Ṣādiq and said 'Show me God.' He said, 'But have you not heard that Moses was told (7.139), "Thou shalt never see me?" He said, 'Yes, indeed; but this is the creed of Muḥammad, that one man exclaims "My heart sees my Lord," another man raises a cry that, "I do not worship a lord whom I do not see," Ṣādiq said, 'Tie him up and cast him into the Tigris'... (The man's cries of help to Ja'far are left unheeded until, on the point of drowning, he cries "My God. Help! Help!")... "Ṣādiq said 'Pull him out.' They did so, and left him for an hour till he regained his composure. Then Ṣādiq said 'Did you see *al-Haqq*?' He replied, 'So long as I put my hand in other than God's, I was behind a veil. When I took refuge in Him and was in desperate straits, a window was thrown open in my innermost heart. At that place where I was looking down, I saw Him Whom I was seeking. And when my desperation had passed away, He had passed away—(27.63): "He is one to answer the man in desperation if he calls upon him." Ṣādiq said, 'So long as you were saying '*Ṣādiq*' (trusty) you were (*kādhīb*) false. Now you should preserve that window which reveals that the God of the world is down below there!'<sup>52</sup>

Once again one notes the elaboration of Kulaynī's more historical account. While some of 'Aṭṭār's terminology is more poetically metaphorical—the "veil," the "window into the heart"—than Ja'far may have used, the basic Sūfī principle of *ma'rifaḥ qalbiyah* is faithfully stated. Other lexical details, such as the use of *al-Hāqā*, are also (doubtless by accident) historically faithful. Massignon suggests that it was from the *tafsīr* of Ja'far and the mystic circles of Kūfah that the term *al-Haqq*, spread, through Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣri and others, to become the classic name for God in *tāsawwuf*.<sup>53</sup>

#### (iv) Continuing Guidance

Ja'far's thought, anticipating that of the Sūfis in the several areas which have been noted, also extended beyond the conventional dimensions of theology; God's action in history, in the present, and in the hereafter. The intellectual, moral and spiritual concerns which we have discussed drew Ja'far to attempt a theosophical, metahistorical doctrine of God and man.

(51) Abū Nu'aym: *op. cit.*, pp. 196–7.

(52) 'Aṭṭār *op. cit.*, p. 13.

(53) Massignon: *op. cit.*, p. 570.

The categories of theology and philosophy, the data of history, and existential experience—all were inadequate to express the mystery of God's continuing guidance within and beyond time. Ja'far saw the points of man's contact with God in the person of the prophets and imāms. The succession of imāms and "friends of God" as it was later regulated, was not, of course, at issue in Ja'far's day. But one may detect in his definitions of prophecy a conviction of Ja'far that it is these issues which hold the possibility of guiding mankind on to the path of Truth.

It is the doctrine of *Nūr Muḥammadiyah* which seems to have comprised much of this theosophy. A *hadith* relative to surah 43.81 is recorded in Baqlī and attributed to Ja'far:

"The first thing which God created was the light of Muḥammad."<sup>54</sup>

Massignon points out that in the doctrine of Ja'far this could simply have implied the revelation of the Qur'ān. However, it was apparently developed in a doctrine of emanation of Divine knowledge not only through the prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, but also onwards through the imāms after Muḥammad. Mas'ūdī quotes a *hadith* from Ja'far which recognises the Light's falling upon Adam and remaining veiled until Muḥammad. Thereafter (in Donaldson's translation):

"The light descended upon our most noble men, and shone through our Imams, so that we are in fact the lights of Heaven and of Earth. To us is salvation committed, and from us are the secrets of science derived, for we are the destination that all must strive to reach. Our *mahdī* will be the final Proof, the Seal of the Imams, the Deliverer of the Imamate, the Apex of the Light, and the Source of all good works."<sup>55</sup>

This transition of authoritative guidance from Prophet to Imām seems to require explanation. It has certainly been rejected by countless Muslims. It becomes coherent, though not necessarily acceptable, when one recognises that there can be common ground between *wahy*, Divine communication to the Prophet, and *ilhām*, Divine communication to the imām or wali. Ja'far is described in the *Kitāb al-Hujjah* of Kulaynī as having established categories of this Divine communication.<sup>56</sup> He recognises as first of the *ṭabaqāt al-anbiyā' wa-al-rusul wa-al-a'imma* the *nabi* with no responsibility to transmit *ilhām* and *a'lām* to others; secondly, he sees the *nabi* who does have visions and does hear messages in his sleep, but who has no mission and is therefore not a *rasūl*. These two categories account for the *walāyat* of the *awliyā'* and for the *nubūrawah bāṭiniyyah*, which are so important for Shi'is. The further categories are the *nabi mursal*, sent to a limited group, and finally the prophet sent to bring a new *shari'ah*. The "imāmology" which results from this is not intended to infringe the uniqueness of Muḥammad's mission, only to contest its isolation. The imāmāte is not simply a genealogical succession from Muḥammad, but, more important, a prophetic succession, always

(54) *Ibid.*, p. 629.

(55) Donaldson: *Shi'ite Religion*, p. 139.

(56) Kulaynī: *op. cit.*, p. 101.



remembering the definitions and stratification of prophecy.

Corbin points out that Ja'far's insistence upon the necessity of God's sending prophetic guidance is not exceeded even by the logical insistence upon this by Ibn Sina and Birūnī. Man's innate human weakness allows no possibility of his arranging his affairs alone.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, Kulaynī attributed to Ja'far an eloquent justification for a continuing, cyclical prophetic guidance from God:

"It is settled, then, that men must have those who give orders and prohibitions in the name of God, the *Hakīm* and '*Alīm*, and who are His interpreters (*mu'abbirūna 'auhu*); they are the *anbiyā'* and the choicest of His creation; they are the *hukamā'* taught and sent forth by *hikmah*. They are not different from men in their creatureliness and bodily frame, but in men's normal conditions they are assisted by *hikmat* through Him Who is *Hakīm* and '*Alīm*. This is a settled thing in each age and time through the signs and proofs (*al-dalā'il wa-al-barāhīn*) brought to them by the *rusul* and *anbiyā'*, in order that God may not leave the earth bare of a *Hujjah* with whom there is an *alam* to show the truth of his sayings and the lawfulness of his justice."<sup>58</sup>

Only the evidence and proof of such a *Hujjah* will maintain the permanence of God's guidance of mankind, the validity of the metahistorical pact whereby God challenges man's estrangement from Himself: *sūrah* 7.171 "Am I not your Lord?"

The sense of man's exile and need for guidance is a poignant and intimate conviction in the rich tradition that grew from Ja'far. For it is only in exile from the human community that one can feel the full force of exile from God. Indeed, a man must become *gharīb* if he is to be guided. Nawbakhtī records Ja'far as saying:

"*Islām* in its beginning was a stranger and it will revert to being a stranger as it began. Paradise belongs to the strangers."<sup>59</sup>

Corbin draws attention to the elaboration of this theme by Jābir ibn Hayyān al-Šūfī:

"Indeed the summons of the Imām Ja'far does not tend towards a social religion. It is a summons to the spiritual exile, renouncing all established orders in this world in order to emigrate to the Imām of the Resurrection or towards the spiritual cult of Šūfism, which is one and the same thing for *Shī'ī* šūfism."<sup>60</sup>

The constant prayer for God's guidance expressed in *sūrah* 1.5—*ihdina al-sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*—is interpreted by Ja'far as *urshudna ila mahabbatika*. God's Love was the supreme aspiration of many Šūfis, not so much a final goal as a permanent assurance. The continuing evidence and experience of God's Guidance and Love could illuminate the Šūfī's mind, empower his will, and satisfy his soul. Among the first in the Muslim tradition to apprehend this was Ja'far al-Šādiq.

(57) Corbin: *op. cit.*, p. 54.

(58) Kulaynī: *op. cit.*, p. 97.

(59) Nawbakhtī: *op. cit.*, p. 63.

(60) Corbin: *Combat Spirituel*, p. 89.

# SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī: *Hāyat al-Awliyā'*, Vol. III, Cairo, 1352/1933  
 'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn: *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, ed. Nicholson, Part I, London, 1905  
 Corbin, Henry: "Le Combat spirituel du Shī'isme," pp. 69-126, in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXX, Zurich, 1962.  
 " " *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique*, Paris, 1964.  
 " " *L'Imagination Creatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Paris, 1958.  
 " " *Le Livre des Penetrations metaphysiques*, Teheran/Paris, 1964  
 " " "De la Philosophie Prophetique en Islam Shī'ite," pp. 49-116, in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXXI, Zurich, 1963.  
 Dhahabī: *Mizān al-ītidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, Vol. I, Cairo, 1325/1907.  
 " " *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz*. Vol. I, Hyderabad, 1375/1955.  
 Donaldson, Dwight, M. *The Shī'ite Religion*, London, 1933.  
 Hodgson, Marshall, G.S. "Dja'far al-Šādik" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Leiden/London, 1960.  
 " " "How did the Early Shī'a Become Sectarian," pp. 1-13, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. LXXV, No. 1, 1955.  
 Hujwīrī: *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, tr. Nicholson, London, 1936.  
 Ibn Khallikān: *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, Cairo, 1367/1948.  
 " " *Biographical Dictionary*, tr. Baron de Slane, Vol. I, Paris, 1843.  
 Kashshī: *Akhhār al-Rijāl*, Karbala, n.d.  
 Kraus, P: "Djābir b. Ḥayyān" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Leiden, London, 1960.  
 Kulaynī: *Al-Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, lith., Lucknow, 1302/1885.  
 Makki: *Qūt al-Qulūb*, Cairo, 1351/1932.  
 Massignon, Louis: *Essai sur les Origines du Lēxique Technique de la Mystique Musulmane*, Paris, 1914-22  
 " " *La Passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn-Mansour al-Hallāj*, Vol. II, Paris, 1922.  
 Mieli, Aldo: *La Science Arabe*, Leiden, 1938.  
 Nawbakhtī: *Firāq al-Shī'ah*, ed. Ritter, Istanbul, 1931.  
 Ritter, Helmut: *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1255.  
 Shahrastānī: *Kitāb al-Milāl Wa al-Nihal*, ed. Cureton, Leipzig, 1923.  
 Strothmann, R.: notice on p. 302 of *Der Islam* XXI, 1933  
 Tabarī: *Annales*, ed. de Goeje, Leiden, 1885-9.